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ABSTRACT

This collaborative, critical inquiry describes and analyzes what happened in the authors' respective classrooms when two pre-service teachers responded angrily to a film and a novel designed to help them acknowledge, honor, and work effectively with the increasingly diverse students in the school district surrounding their university. The paper explains the intent of showing the film and assigning the novel, and then the authors describe how they were caught off-guard by the students' outbursts. In the end, through an ongoing dialogic conversation about the critical incidents, the authors identify the missteps they took in their classes, communicate important changes in their thinking, and share ideas on how they plan on teaching about pluralism in the future. (Author/BT)

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TOWARD TEACHING & LEARNING ABOUT PLURALISM:

OUR MISSTEPS AND NEXT STEPS

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1

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TOWARD TEACHING & LEARNING ABOUT PLURALISM: OUR MISSTEPS AND NEXT STEPS

In this collaborative, critical inquiry, we describe and analyze what happened in our respective classrooms when two pre-service teachers angrily responded to a film and a novel designed to help them acknowledge, honor, and work effectively with the increasingly diverse students in the school districts surrounding our university. After explaining what we had hoped to accomplish by showing the film and assigning the novel, we describe how we were caught off-guard by the students' outbursts. In the end, through an on-going dialogic conversation about the critical incidents, we identify missteps we took in our classes, communicate important changes in our thinking, and share ideas on how we plan on teaching about pluralism in the future. We conclude with a renewed sense of hope about the education of teachers who will teach in increasingly diverse schools and a deeper appreciation for the complexities and complications of teaching and learning about pluralism.

Recently, in separate incidents within our respective classrooms, we have had preservice teachers angrily respond to classroom materials designed to help them acknowledge, honor, and work effectively with the increasingly diverse students in the school districts surrounding our university. After watching a film about multicultural education one student fumed, "I'm tired of having my whiteness jammed down my throat!" Another, after reading a novel intended to introduce language and literacy issues, loudly protested, "I can't believe that we are subjected to this kind of trash. This is despicable. It [the novel] is nothing but a bunch of foul language garbage and should be burned!" These critical incidents sparked an extended conversation about our missteps and next steps in preparing pre-service teachers for increasingly diverse settings. As our conversation evolved, we speculated that other teacher educators might benefit from the insights we collaboratively arrived at. This belief motivated us to deconstruct what happened in our classrooms and extend our conversation in the form of this essay. Before turning to the larger conversation, we describe the nature of our inquiry and recount the critical incidents in the context of our aims and respective classes.

The Nature of Our Inquiry

We undertook this inquiry in the spirit of teacher research, attempting to seek new understandings related to teaching and learning about pluralism through critical examination and thoughtful reflection. This inquiry does not match precisely the criteria for any one category of teacher research; rather, it is a blurred genre, a hybrid construction of oral and essay inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Just as Harry Wolcott (1990) argued that qualitative researchers must endeavor to develop their own language of legitimization, so we propose our own nuanced understanding and expression of teacher research.

In this essay, we deliberately set out to present our on-going, dialectic conversation (i.e., our oral inquiry) about two critical teaching and learning incidents. Thus the written text takes the form of dialogue in an attempt to portray life-like conversation between two colleagues. We wanted this reiteration to be as believable to the reader as possible, perhaps almost situating her or him just

outside our office doors. As a result, we purposely limited our references to the work of other scholars because we sought to authentically reflect the manner of our actual conversation.

Viewing the Same Film Differently in Ron's Secondary Social Studies Methods Class. In my secondary social studies methods class, my students and I focus most of our attention on exemplary social studies classroom teaching. Initially, I want my students to come to grips with the fact that many secondary students rank their social studies classes among their least favorite. Then we practice many things including framing units around open-ended questions, designing performance tasks and rubrics, and presenting lessons that encourage in-depth inquiry and active learning. In addition to learning some innovative approaches to designing units and teaching lessons, I eventually want them to improve schooling as members of teams, or academic departments, or school-wide committees. To do this, they need to begin thinking about schools as cultures. One way I promote that understanding is by showing *School Colors*, a documentary film.

Originally a Frontline Special on PBS, the 150 minute film tells the story of Berkeley High's 1994 senior class. The film includes a series of provocative vignettes produced by a hand picked group of Berkeley High seniors who are representative of the school's ethnic diversity. The film powerfully and poignantly questions the notion of equal educational opportunity in the context of racial segregation and tracking. It also features some outspoken students who passionately communicate their ethnic pride while simultaneously rejecting popular notions of the United States as a multicultural melting pot or tossed salad.

After showing the first two-thirds of the film in one class session, I retrieved the tape from the video cassette recorder. While students were gathering their belongings, I naively asked, "So, did you enjoy that?" "No!" Leah, a thirty-year-old student, angrily replied before anyone else had a chance. Okay, I frantically thought to myself, what's a *better* way to phrase the question? "Did you find it provocative? Did it make you think?" "No! I found it disturbing!" she shot back. "I'm tired of people shoving my whiteness down my throat!"

Reading the Same Text Differently in Kyle's Language Arts Seminar. In one of the graduate courses I teach, students examine different orientations toward language choice and use as they begin thinking about promising teaching and learning in the language arts. Students

usually have in mind typical notions of learning methods; that is, they plead with me to just tell them exactly how to teach. But, I always have something else in mind.

From the beginning I had intended that we begin our study of language and literacy by reading the novel PUSH, by Sapphire (1997). This is deeply compelling story about Precious Jones, a sixteen year old single mother living in Harlem, who has been invisible to her parents, her peers, her teachers, and the authorities in her community. They all dismiss her as just one more problem, as just one more example of a wasted life. Through this story the reader walks with Precious on a journey of education and enlightenment as she learns not only how to read and write but how to make these acts of literacy her very own.

But before we actually began, one student's alarming skepticism set the tone for the ensuing literature and language study. "What should we read for the next class session?" a few students asked. An enigmatically sober-faced peer, Sarah, replied, in a wry, cool manner, "push." Finding myself unable to interpret that statement and respond, she added that, "you [the students] are about to be pushed by his hidden political agenda." Immediately there was a resounding outcry, "What's that?" At this point I commented that PUSH was a novel that related specifically and poignantly to issues of language choice and use that they would face as teachers in middle school classrooms. I then asked them to read as much as they were able to, suggesting that they would probably finish it before they could put the book down.

At our second class session, we started our inquiry into language and literacy by listening to an audio tape-recorded reading of the beginning of the story by Sapphire herself. The story begins: "I was left back when I was twelve because I had a baby for my fahver. ... I'm really mad 'cause actually I like maff even though I don't do nuffin', don't open my book even. I jus' sit there for fifty minutes. I don't cause trouble. In fac' some of the other natives get restless I break on 'em. I say, 'Shut up mutherfuckers I'm tryin' to learn something.'" (pp. 3, 6). I played the audio recording because I thought Sapphire's authentic rendition would set the most appropriate mood for our inquiry. As they listened, I wanted the students to flood their minds with remembrances of the story and then select one or two passages that they found particularly compelling. Specifically, I wanted them to identify a passage that provoked them and challenged their thinking about language,

Precious, and themselves. We listened for nearly ten minutes. Next, I invited them to note the passage they had selected and write a reflection on what they thought about language and how they felt challenged. Then, they broke into smaller groups to examine and discuss their reflections. After about forty minutes, I asked students to suspend their small group discussions and invited them to reconvene as a whole group. And, it was at that time that we examined our ideas, discussed comments and questions together, and really began to say what was on our minds.

Not surprisingly, the first few comments were innocuous. Several students mentioned that they were "moved" by reading the novel and thinking about the character Precious, "who lived such a sad and insufferable life." A few mentioned that they "loved" reading the story because it illustrated the promise of working hard to overcome obstacles and become educated and literate. Still others commented that they couldn't really describe their feelings but confessed that it was a gripping read. The fourth comment came from a non-traditional student who had entered graduate school after completing a successful career in the U. S. military. He literally exploded as he remarked: "I can't believe that we are subjected to this kind of trash. This is despicable. It [the novel] is nothing but a bunch of foul language garbage and should be burned. I'm disgusted about this, enough that I'm going to go to the President of the University and the Board of Regents to show them what is happening at this Christian institution." His voice was loud, and his message carried the enormous weight of fear and anger.

In looking back at these teaching-learning episodes, Ron and I clearly recognized the emotional as well as cognitive conflicts students experienced. And, although we had anticipated that there would be tension in our discussions and dialogues about multiculturalism, we were somewhat surprised and seriously saddened by the strident responses about multiculturalism in education. Resisting the temptation to identify students as the cause of difficulty, we further analyzed these strikingly similar episodes. With an aim to glean new insights into the challenges of teaching and learning about pluralism, we committed to articulating our intentions and deconstructing the critical incidents we faced. Consequently, we realized that within our respective classes we both had taken a few missteps.

What We Had Hoped to Accomplish

Kyle: *What had you expected to accomplish by showing the film?*

Ron: Watching the film was a consciousness raising activity of sorts. Too few of my students have experience working with urban students. I wanted them to confront ethnically diverse, passionate, opinionated, outspoken, mature, articulate, and at times, angry urban high school students and to self-assess their preparedness for working effectively with them. Beyond that, I hoped they would begin developing an appreciation for the students in all their complexity. I also wanted them to think about the classrooms they envision creating in the context of those in the film, especially the loud, chaotic, and wonderfully student-centered ones. Ultimately, I wanted them to grapple with whether or not Berkeley High is a "good" school.

In my view, it is a good school. I like what Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1984) writes about good schools. She suggests that at good schools there is "a consciousness about imperfections and a willingness to admit them and search for their origins and solutions" (309). In the film, many of the Berkeley teachers, staff, parents, and students were simultaneously seeking to understand and resolve the school's "imperfections". I didn't expect many of my students to agree that Berkeley was a good school. So, to some degree, I showed the film to create cognitive dissonance. In the end, I hoped the film would cause my students to rethink several regularities of schooling including the notion that the best classrooms and schools are free of controversy and conflict.

Ron: *And, what did you expect to accomplish with your literature study?*

Kyle: I generally expect pre-service teachers to think about both the complexity and diversity of language use--both within a language and between languages--and their regard for language variations other than their own as an essential precursor for becoming teachers. To this end, I want them to examine the assumption, which they tend to cherish so dearly, that Standard American English (SAE) is correct and proper English. Moreover, I want them to view language and literacy not from an assimilationist perspective, but from one that values language and literacy diversity. Thus, with respect to reading PUSH, I expected them to hear Precious' voice resonating through her spoken and written words; to listen to what she was saying; and to notice the wonderfully complex ways in which Precious was literate.

People often have strong reactions to language choice and use: they can be fiercely proud of their own language and sanctimoniously appalled by that of others. Richard Ruiz (1984) has explained this phenomenon in terms of orientations toward language. With bilingual education as an example, he suggested that individuals and their societies have language-as-problem, language-as-right, or language-as-resource orientations. Because of our nation's long history of language prejudice in school (Crawford, 1991; Takaki, 1993), it is imperative that pre-service teachers examine their attitudes toward the diverse languages spoken by children in classrooms today, considering carefully how and why they assign a particular value to particular language use.

From my point of view, deliberate critical examination is a necessary exercise for mainstream, English-only-speaking, white educators because they are insulated by their own worldview and ignorant of their own collusion to oppress ethnolinguistic differences. They typically view their language as a resource but consider other languages and dialects to be a problem. For example, one student said:

> the way Precious talks may be okay around her friends or at home with her family but she still has to learn to speak English correctly...otherwise she won't make it...you know, you can't have people speaking English however they want to because we wouldn't understand each other or be able to get along...this is a great nation that depends on its citizens speaking English correctly....

This comment, and other similar ones, suggests that many of these teachers-to-be perceive Precious', and perhaps their future students', language only from their own sociocultural sensibilities and judge them by their own arbitrary subjectivity. By reading PUSH I had hoped that they would contend with the reality of their prejudices toward language diversity and confront their orientations toward language. Through this inquiry, then, they would begin to sense the subjectivity of their own moralizing about which language should be spoken when and where and what standards should guide literacy assessment and instruction. To these ends, then, I urged my students to face their cultural and academic prejudices and, in several cases, their ethnocentric points of view.

Our Initial Reactions.

Kyle: *So what was your initial reaction to Leah's outburst?*

Ron: It caught me off guard and I was a bit flustered. Class had just ended so I told Leah and one or two lingering students that we would discuss the film during our next class session. This happened in December, near the end of the semester. Until that point, the students and I enjoyed a nice sense of classroom community. Leah's angry response to the film was our first experience with conflict. As I returned to my office, I thought about your experience with teaching "Push" and I wondered how I might help my students better understand the Berkeley students' experiences.

Kyle: *How did the next class session go?*

Ron: In short, not very well. I showed the remainder of the film and then initiated a discussion by asking the students to summarize the Berkeley students' frustrations with common school practices. I was a bit preoccupied with Leah. I asked her if she wanted to elaborate on the parts of the film that most angered her. She sat silently deferring to another student who failed to articulate the students' concerns, instead, he explained that he agreed with the Berkeley football coach who suggested in the middle of the film that "If people don't make it (racial tension) an issue, it's not an issue." Other students nodded in seeming agreement.

I tried to challenge their assumption by relating the film to what was happening at a neighboring high school, ironically, Leah's alma mater. African American parents and students, a marked minority, were voicing their frustrations with the educational status quo. In turn, white teachers, parents, and students complained that the African American parents and students were creating an issue where one didn't really exist. The real problem, these school community members argued, was sensational media coverage. Many of my students seemingly agreed.

Given that mindset, they were reticent to discuss the film in more depth. I was frustrated by their non-response, but at the same time, I sensed it was a serendipitous opportunity to model how social studies educators might approach contentious issues. Unfortunately however, I wasn't sure how to proceed since students were hesitant to speak. Gradually, students recounted a few scenes from the film. I was struck by the gap between our interpretations. Where I saw a school actively and honestly striving to remedy the negative effects of racial segregation, most of my students saw a

school hopelessly preoccupied with race. Where I saw the Berkeley students' ethnic pride as a source of meaning and strength, at least some of my students viewed the students' ethnic pride as shoving their whiteness down their throats. In the end, the discussion was stilted and short-lived. I was disappointed with how the class and semester ended.

Ron: *How did the next few class sessions go for you*?

Kyle: Perhaps better than I had imagined, although I don't think we advanced our examination of our academic and cultural prejudices about language and their implications for teaching and learning in K-12 school settings. I had anticipated that people would be passive-aggressive in their resistance of this pursuit. Those students who had not read the entire novel finished reading, and those who had read it once agreed to reread parts of it just to keep themselves familiar with the text. For the next few class sessions, I invited students to engage in discussion about the language of the novel. But, this time, I asked them to identify specific examples of Precious' literacy as well as relate what was bewildering their understandings and assumptions about English literacy. Additionally, I expected them to determine how *Precious is literate*--notice this is stated in the affirmative--and in what ways teaching and learning standards did or did not address Precious' language and literacy.

Over the course of the following few weeks I, too, was pre-occupied. Although the initial outrage expressed by one student and the silent endorsement of this by the majority of his peers in the class was unsettling, I urged students to reflect on that first discussion time and again. And as our inquiry continued, they reflected on the merit of literacy standards by referring to Precious' language and literacy as the mark of quality. My intent in re-designing the sequence of this teaching-learning episode was to confront issues of power by displacing the privilege awarded "Standard American English" and the stigma attached to Precious' language and, alternatively, situating her language as the standard by which so-called standards could be judged.

Deconstructing the Critical Incidents

Ron: *And, going back to the original incident, how did you make sense of what had happened*?

Kyle: In the midst of that contentious moment, I remember that I felt afraid. Even though I had suspected that many students would have an adverse reaction to the story, I had not expected such an

outrageous emotional display. I was afraid, momentarily, that their alarming reaction would prohibit any reasoned dialogue about the novel, about language diversity, about racism, and about how all of these relate to their becoming classroom teachers. Without reservation, Peter affirmed his attitude toward the sound and substance of language that was different than his own. Peter had made up his mind: he strictly opposed the idea that such language was worthy of his attention as a student, and he strongly rejected the challenge that anything other than mainstream, white, fundamentalist-Christian discourse could represent English literacy. He immediately opposed my proposal that if he were to listen to his students speak their native dialect, or language, in the classroom, then they would reveal more fully the richness of their personal literacies. Most of his peers nodded their heads in agreement. Of the 32 students, less than a handful cast their comments from an alternative perspective. I was indeed troubled in that moment because I could not anticipate what he, or any one else, might say next. Given the increasingly uncomfortable tension within me around this incident, moreover, I was becoming at risk for making my next teaching steps missteps.

Paradox is a metaphor that I found very helpful in seeking to make sense of this critical teaching-learning incident. Knowing my proclivity to despair about the immediate and observable aspects of my teaching, I have learned to pause, suspend my immediate judgments, and reflect more deeply on the nuances of the situation, which are invisible to the objective eye. After more vigilant reflection, I realized that what had just happened was not necessarily the ruin of our inquiry into issues of language diversity. Rather, what had just happened in fact had to happen if we were going to actually examine our assumptions, conceptions, and prejudices about language, and particularly the privileging of one dialect of English over other dialects and languages. So, I listened cautiously to Peter's retort and the successive affirmations by many of his peers.

Peter clearly offered the strongest rejection of the idea of multicultural language use in school, but he was not alone. Even the few students who actually disagreed with him had little to say in support of the legitimacy of Precious' language and literacy. Instead their comments reflected their pity for Precious as an individual who had been dealt a bad hand in the game of life and, therefore, she couldn't help the fact that she didn't speak correctly or couldn't read or write.

As I pondered the nature of Peter's response, it occurred to me that he had positioned himself as though he were facing a threatening opponent. And, he asserted his authority as a culturally and socially privileged individual in light of what he perceived to be a threat to the sensibilities of a proper education. His tacit proposition was, perhaps, that because I had assigned great importance to the language expressed in PUSH I had, in effect, disavowed the importance of *his language*.

Although the cry of his voice pierced the auditorium and provoked a wave of momentary silence among his peers, it eventually became evident that it had the opposite effect. Peter's cacophonic protest actually gave voice to the extant, ethnocentric assumptions and beliefs about language choice and use in classrooms and schools. Even though Peter wanted to silence the sound of the novel's language and disrupt the imminent discussion of such literacy, he actually articulated out loud the harshness of the reality of language discrimination. Thus, paradoxically, rather than discouraging his peers from engaging with him his outcry opened a forum for dialogue.

Kyle: *You seem to suggest that something went awry? In hindsight, what was that?*

Ron: Several things. One glaring misstep was failing to provide opportunities for discussion until the entire film was over. Also, I inadequately anticipated the depth of some students' negative reactions. Based upon my experience of showing this film to previous classes, I anticipated mixed reactions; nonetheless, I was caught off-guard by the depth of Leah's anger. And, although I briefly described the film and talked about its importance, I did not share a detailed, substantive, or convincing enough rationale, for showing it.

Most importantly, the structure of my class and the structure of the University's secondary education program limited the effectiveness of the activity. In hindsight, showing "School Colors" was too much of an add-on activity. In the press to teach the conventional course content, I was hard pressed to build into the syllabus a series of increasingly sophisticated opportunities to discuss important questions raised in the film—questions about tracking, educational opportunity, and multiculturalism. In short, it was terribly unrealistic to expect one documentary film shown near the very end of the term to inspire my students to meaningfully rethink the regularities of schooling. Similarly, throughout their School of Education coursework, Leah and her classmates were not provided enough opportunities to research, discuss, and acquire first-hand knowledge of the issues

explored in the film. Note that Leah did not say, "*I know this is an important next step of mine, but* I'm tired of having my whiteness jammed down my throat." Leah's actual words suggest limited self-understanding and a lack of appreciation for the uniqueness of her worldview.

Reconstructing Our Practice

Ron: *Why do you see this as a critical incident in your teaching?*

Kyle: This incident was critical because it embodied the fundamental theoretical confrontation between privilege and protest. The students' outcry against the presumed quality of Precious' language and their judgements that her language is a sign of illiteracy, or unsatisfactory literacy, made visible the reality of social privilege and its response to protests against it. In terms of pedagogy, moreover, it was critical because it centered the teaching and learning around real issues of power. And personally speaking, this incident required me to assess my faith in public dialogue as a method of inquiry and my regard for emotionality in intellectual pursuits.

Despite the difficulty of engaging in such confrontation, and the nearly overwhelming temptation to turn away from it, I realized that it was necessary. Power is indeed real; and, I see this unmistakably in Peter's response. Power is involved in maintaining the privilege of one dialect of American English over others; and, in this particular case, Peter is intent on preserving the privilege and place of his own language over that of Precious. I suggest that teachers and students must engage in this confrontation in order to fully sense the reality of such disparity as well as the implications of it for schooling.

I wanted to suspend the discourse of privileged individuals about appropriate language choice and use in school in order that they might pause long enough to hear their own discourse and examine the nature of it. That approximately fifty percent of people of color and who speak English as a second language live in economic poverty, while less than twenty percent of white, mother-tongue-English speakers do so, is a testament to prevalence of privilege. And, that retention and graduation rates across domains of language, color, and economics are grossly inequivalent is a testament to the grave importance of protest. Schooling in this country has always been driven by the directive to conform to whichever standards have been set by those in power.

Peter heard Precious' protest and retorted in a visceral voice, proclaiming disdain but resonating unmistakable fear. Even though this can be an unsettling experience, it is what must happen if we are to reflect carefully enough in order to consider the legitimacy of the protests about power and the consequences of privileging some over others.

Ron: *Then what might be your next steps*?

Kyle: I believe there are three general steps that I would like to take in the future. My first step will be to guard against any instinctive effort I may want to make toward preventing something similar from happening again. Although it might be considered natural to want to avoid conflict, and from a particular perspective it is considered "good teaching," it is inconsistent with the humanistic nature of educational endeavors and the aims of multicultural education. My suggestion for a second next step is inspired by the notion of unarticulated stories (Shor, 1996). It is critical that I seek alternative ways of encouraging students in my class to articulate their stories about themselves and why they are who they are in order that they might regard the confrontation between privilege and protest differently. And lastly, like you explained, I will continue seeking the support of colleagues to develop structures across our classes and programs that encourage students to engage in public dialogue and sustain their examination of all issues of diversity.

Kyle: *And, what will your next steps be?*

Ron: My next steps flow from these missteps. First, in the future, I will show particular scenes instead of showing the film from beginning to end. Between scenes, I will provide opportunity for discussion. Second, in concentrating almost exclusively on conventional course content, I have slighted critically important skills and sensibilities. I need to rethink the entire course syllabus and introduce more activities that foster self-understanding and more appreciation for contending viewpoints. This is demonstrating a firm grasp of the obvious, but at minimum, preparing preservice teachers for increasingly diverse settings needs to be a semester-long process. Beyond that, my colleagues and I need to redesign the teacher education program so that we promote self-understanding and cultivate cross cultural skills and sensibilities not just within individual courses, but between them as well.

Kyle: *What have you learned about teaching and learning more generally?*

Ron: In addition to learning that I need to be more thoughtful about cultivating cross cultural skills and sensibilities, I have been reminded of the value of collaboration. Sometimes, in teacher education, we talk about the importance of collaboration without truly modeling it. In part, I was able to think about my experience more deeply because I had thought through your experience. Similarly, you helped me make sense of my experience by helping me make connections between our incidents and reading I was doing. At the time, I was writing a review of *When Students Have Power* by Ira Shor (1996). This was a tremendously illuminating book about Shor's efforts to share power with the students in his City University course on "Utopias". At one point in the story, Shor writes about a student who capitalizes on her newfound power by arguing that regular attendance should not be required. Shor's analysis of this critical incident (pp. 94-96) helped me avoid blaming Leah for the strained discussion of "School Colors".

Recently, I submitted a proposal to present my version of this essay at a National Council of the Social Studies conference. One person who reviewed my proposal wrote, "The author seems upset that the students don't get the truth as he sees it." In all honesty, the reviewer was right when Leah's classmate suggested, "It's not an issue, if you don't make it one." I did not agree and I was frustrated that he took that position. However, as I began sharing my experience with you and reflecting on the way Shor comes to understand his student's reasons for not wanting attendance to be required, I came to realize what I wrote previously—that my colleagues and I have failed Leah.

Other examples of how I have benefited from our joint effort to learn from these similar experiences come to mind. For example, one of your main insights that emerged in our latter drafts of this essay will enable me to anticipate negative responses to course materials that require my predominantly white students to confront white privilege. You concluded that Peter's outcry had to happen if your students and you were going to examine your "assumptions, conceptions, and prejudices about language, and particularly the privileging of one dialect of English over other dialects and languages." I was unable to interpret Leah's outburst in that manner during class; consequently the subsequent discussion was superficial and dispiriting. In short, your interpretation of Peter's outcry helped me better understand the underlying meaning of Leah's declaration. Leah

reacted negatively to the Berkeley High students because they were calling the relative importance of her race into question just as Peter reacted strongly to the relative importance of his language being challenged. As a result of this understanding, I stand a much better chance of helping students honestly and constructively begin talking about, thinking about, and coming to grips with white privilege and its implications on their learning, on their teaching, and on their professional lives more generally.

In the end, I need to continue redesigning my course and our School of Education teacher education programs to help students like Leah and her classmates move beyond their subjectivity, develop perspective-taking skills, and broaden their worldviews.

Ron: *And, what do you think your critical incident means about teaching and learning?*

Kyle: That is a very difficult question to answer. I think, however, there are three findings about teaching and learning that emerge from my reflection. First, teaching and learning are clearly human endeavors. By that I mean teachers and learners must always contend with their beliefs, values, and personal histories. Second, there is always a complicated interplay among cognition, emotion, and volition. And third, it occurs to me that genuine teaching and learning emerges out of seeming contradictions.

I see clearly from my reflections that I had neglected to anticipate the important role that particular beliefs and values as well as personal histories would play in our inquiry into language diversity. The extent to which students were willing to consider language alternative to their own, or to that of the mainstream, was indeed constrained by the ideals they held about the status of their own linguistic and cultural traditions and the judgments they placed on others in comparison. As a teacher, I must remember that what my students understand about language and literacy is translated through prevailing assumptions. In light of this, teaching and learning are not just matters of acquiring knowledge about what is correct and incorrect; rather, they are endeavors to see that our own ways of knowing about the world are as much a social construction as are those of others.

In terms of my second finding, I realize that human sentiment and willfulness are essential elements in teaching and learning. Students care deeply about certain ideas and they stand tall to defend their points of view. It follows then that in the precious moments of teaching and learning

there must be time for examining our passions as well as our best understandings of why we are passionate. To shun, or even ignore, these human qualities in the pursuit of teaching and learning would be to deny my own humanity and that of my students. With an aim to truly comprehend why students engage in the ways they do, I must honor how they express their feelings as well as what they feel.

Moreover, as I have reflected on the first discussions with my students about PUSH, I realize that to understand I must direct my attention to what does not seem significant and deliberate the alternative meanings of what seems so obvious. It is necessary then to situate my analyses in the seeming contradictions of what I know and experience. Thus, I sought to examine the incongruity between what reasoned dialogue and successful outcomes are expected to look like and what actually developed in the classroom through our inquiry of linguistic pluralism. In so doing, I learned that the common standards of classroom comportment are in and of themselves contradictions and decoys for the more promising possibilities for engaging and important teaching and learning.

Kyle: *But, why spend so much time and energy revisiting this incident? Why not simply agree to disagree on the film's meaning and importance and return to more conventional social studies methods topics*?

Ron: Because Leah's outburst was symbolic. In the simplest terms, Leah and many of her classmates responded to both the Berkeley students and the students at the adjacent high school by saying, "I haven't experienced oppression or racism; therefore, your claims of oppression and racism are exaggerated and unwarranted." Their response illuminates an overlooked, albeit essential dilemma, for teacher educators and others interested in improving public schools. What can we do to help the next generation of predominantly white teachers move beyond their subjectivity, develop perspective-taking skills, and broaden their worldviews? Similarly, what can we do to cultivate cross cultural sensibilities in the next generation of predominantly white teachers, sensibilities that will increase the odds that they will acknowledge, honor, and work effectively with the nation's increasingly diverse students? In the end, to some degree, my X University colleagues and I have failed Leah. She has successfully met all of the State teacher candidate requirements and maintained a high grade point average, but in important ways, she's ill prepared for urban, Berkeley-like settings.

Whether Leah and her peers learn to work effectively with increasingly diverse students will depend on whether they know themselves well and whether they will listen and learn from those students of theirs whose life experiences are different than theirs. Excellent teachers are far more than skilled technicians. They demonstrate respect for students and students' different moods, mannerisms, and mindsets do not threaten them. Excellent teaching always involves outstanding interpersonal skills, but given changing demographics, it's imperative that preservice teachers develop cross cultural skills and sensibilities. As teacher educators, we need to be more sophisticated about cultivating those skills and sensibilities. I hope our discussion of our flawed attempts will help other teacher educators move in that direction.

Epilogue

Lastly, we are compelled to remark on the profound sense of hope we now have through this collaborative, critical inquiry. Although we began this inquiry with restless concerns about the education of teachers who will teach in increasingly diverse classrooms and schools, we conclude with renewed ambition. We are indeed deeply moved by learning to examine carefully and interpret thoughtfully the complexities and complications of teaching and learning about pluralism.

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